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ABSTRACT

A new teacher confronted the reading and writing needs of 22 fifth-graders in a small South Texas community that is home to Mexican American migrant laborers. The children, many of them Spanish language-dominant, were performing significantly below grade-level norms; many did not read or write at all. In 1 year, these students were reading and writing, had learned the required curriculum, and were promoted to the sixth grade. This book tells the story of how that happened. After an introductory first chapter, chapter 2 describes the children, their prior experiences, and their previous lack of success in learning to read and write well enough to perform school tasks. Chapter 3 describes daily journal writing by students and responses by the teacher. Through this interaction, the students and teacher revealed their likes and dislikes, discussed the curriculum, and developed a relationship. Chapter 4 discusses how introducing play into writing and allowing students to select themes helped develop writing skills. Playful writing activities resulted in five class-published collections. Publishing increased children's attention to spelling and editing. Chapter 5 relates how letting the class choose writing topics integrated the entire curriculum with reading and writing. The final chapter recounts the year's success, as expressed by the students in autobiographies written at the end of the year and by the school's reading tests. An epilogue recommends essential pedagogical changes, addresses the issue of equal status for all languages spoken in the classroom, and notes that all the students graduated from high school. Contains 63 references and many examples of student writing. (TD)

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